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Facing 1920

ONE of the best tales told by one of America's best tale-tellers deals with a jobless dandy who was sprawling beneath a tree half-asleep when the whistles and bells of noon aroused him partially from his doze. He gazed sorrowfully at the homeward procession of a group of more industrious dark brethren.

"Fo' some folks," he soliloquized, "'at noise means dinner-time—but fo' me it ain't nuffin' but 12 o'clock!"

On a midnight soon to come, whistles and bells will signify the passing of one brief round of months and the beginning of another.

For some folks those sounds will mean a New Year; for others nothing but January 1.

Which is it going to be for you—just a day (set apart a trifle from other days because you may sleep later and dine more leisurely than usual and go to a matinee) or a genuine occasion—a pausing point for thought-taking, heart-searching, ambition-making? Will it be merely January 1—or a New Year?

There never was in America's history a beginning of a twelvemonth which more seriously, more solemnly, called for thought, for ambition, for resolution. Neither we in our own time nor our forbears in theirs ever faced a year more momentous than 1920 is bound to be. Problems beset us, conditions confront us, compared with which the problems and conditions of past American generations sometimes seem simple. And these must be met in 1920.

The solutions, the remedies, must be provided by all of us—by our thinkers and our workers, by those in the studies and those in the shops; although, in these stressful days, we should each be thinker and worker both.

The Price We Must Pay to Live is the most vital problem for most of us. Yet the answer to it is the simplest. Why is that Price so high? Because there has been a "famine of things," there has not been a supply to go around. What will bring that Price down? The production of more food to sustain us, homes to shelter us, garments to clothe us, vehicles to transport us, and machinery to aid us in turning out all those necessities.

More work, work to the limit of our capacities, will end the famine, will supply enough of those things we need, will move the relation of income and outgo back toward where it was before the world went mad with war and turned most of its energies toward destruction. Less work, as some evil-intentioned leaders of the thoughtless are suggesting, will but intensify the famine, add to the Price. Does not every worker, with a little consideration, realize this? Does he not understand that our salvation is work, creation, production?

Thought—and action based upon thought—must be brought to bear upon our other problems. What is to be our relation to the rest of the world? Few can now believe that our ways lay apart from our brother-nations' ways; that our future is to be aloof from theirs. If we are to go forward, they must go forward with us; we must be brothers in fact.

And who is to speak for us our desires for our relationships? Our representatives in government. Have they spoken truly, thus far? Many of us believe not. Shall we not see to it, then, that those who in future shall speak for us shall truly represent us instead of

political parties, personal prejudices, self-seeking interests?

The choosing of representatives to govern and make laws for us will be one of our gravest duties in 1920. We should forget party-clamor, disregard the mere oratory and enthusiasm of a national campaign, and look at the men who seek our suffrage. Who are they, why do they want to act for us, what are their real motives, what have they done? Here is an obligation to real thought, and none should lightly try to escape the obligation. We shall get the sort of representatives, the sort of spokesmen, that we vote for. If we choose those who do not carry out our desires, the fault is ours, the future blame shall be ours.

So, from all aspects, the beginning of 1920 is of immense importance to every American. And he will not be a good American who passes it by carelessly as merely January 1, a day. It means more than that—it means the opening of an era; and upon our realization of that, and upon our willingness to bear our share of the obligations that fall upon all, will depend whether it is our best era or our worst.

The End of the World

IN EARLY December the world was set agog by an alleged astronomer's prediction that the world would come to an end on December 17. Although the originator of the report was never identified, and the "Professor Porta" of the prediction was never known at any of the institutions of learning where he was said to have carried out his researches, yet the story was enough to create considerable excitement in the United States, Canada, Mexico, Cuba and Porto Rico, according to the newspapers, and to be the attributable cause of numerous suicides.

Such scares and superstitions always have a religious tinge because of the rather shapeless opinion among the multitudes of civilized countries that the Bible foretells the destruction by fire of all things visible. It is only right that the Book should be relieved of that imputation. Great events are said by it to impend, but the "end of the world" is not one of them. The end of this "age" is predicted in numerous passages—this form of civilization, this system of standards and living, industrialism with its attendant evils, so-called "progress" and "civilization"; these, say the Scriptures, are to disappear amid circumstances of great unrest and uproar. But this is not the end of the world, the earth, and does not come in a day.

Scripturally speaking, the next great event on the divine calendar as it relates to this earth, is not the end of the planet, but the reappearance of Christ, commonly called the Second Coming, which is to be succeeded by the withdrawal of all morally sanative influences from the earth, all the moral prohibitions which at this moment prevent men going the length of wickedness of which human nature is capable. Then, when the present order collapses, Christ descends to the earth (his first descent being only to the upper "air") and sets up his kingdom for a thousand years. Even then "the end of the world" has not come. But after the thousand years, the earth is sterilized by fire, the original order of unspoiled nature is restored, and Earth begins to fulfil the destiny which was intended for it from the beginning, a destiny hindered and postponed by humanity's moral lapse.

It was rather strange and disconcerting to see how greatly the religious consciousness of many people seized on the possibility of "the world coming to an end." Members of the Christian faith, at least, would have been saved uncertainty by consulting their Book.

Tax on Tax

A VERY large part of the high cost of living is taxes—pure and simple. It is what we are paying for the war.

The producer of raw materials must pay a tax on his profits and adds not only the tax but a profit on the amount paid in taxes and passes it along to the manufacturer, who in turn must pay a tax on what he makes and adds it to his cost. The manufacturer adds a profit to this; also to the amount paid for the tax part of his raw materials, and passes it along to the jobber, tax multiplied on tax.

The jobber repeats the operation and passes his tax to the retailer who shoves it on to the ultimate consumer, collecting not only his own tax, but the taxes of the three who had a whack at it before he did.

There are many contributing causes to high costs, but one good place to begin work on them is in Congress.

How Long Will the People Stand It?

THE list of our preventable national anxieties shows no perceptible decrease. Those which we formerly explained by reference to the war, continue with us, and there is no sign of abatement. The coal strike and the coal shortage seem to have become almost as fixed a part of the country's winter experience, as Christmas and New Year's. The threat of tie-ups in essential products are constantly with us, and though attempts at a general strike have never been successful in the United States and never will be—because that is not the way the people of the United States do business—still enough trouble has been caused to dislocate industry, curtail the incomes of hundreds of thousands of families, and spread a spirit of anxiety over the people that is harder to bear than actual and unavoidable deprivation.

The coal strike was a case in point. Not that the trouble caused by the men in November and December is the whole story, for it is not. The story begins a long way back. It begins with the deliberate curtailment of the production of coal for the double purpose of making the miners eager for their jobs, and keeping the inflated price of fuel where it was during the war. It is regrettable to have to report that both miners and operators are united in the opinion that the public ought to pay still more for its coal—an opinion which must be held, if at all, in a mind calloused to a sympathetic knowledge of the plight of hundreds of thousands of our people. The coal strike did not make the coal shortage; that shortage existed, together with high prices, for several years before the strike. And the settlement of the strike will not make any notable difference to the public until a deliberate policy is adopted of mining enough coal to bring down the retail price.

This with the steel strike brings us face to face with a new attack—not a strike of labor against capital, but a strike of labor against labor. The total effect of both strikes will have to be told in terms of workingmen thrown out of their jobs for lack of material, factories closed down for lack of fuel, and families suddenly brought face to face with a stopped income at the most expensive period of the winter. The blow fell most heavily on the workingman, who, without any part in the original difficulty, was made victim of it all. The strikers have their union funds on which to live. What surplus has the worker who is not on strike, and yet whom the strike renders compulsorily idle?

Heretofore, when strikes were industrial disputes between two parties, the government has wisely kept out of the quarrel. But when strikes menace the very living of the people, their health and their ability to perform the duties of citizenship, then it is plainly a matter which calls for governmental attention. During these two strikes against the American pay envelope, the government has done little or nothing, except by a persuasion which did not always persuade. Our whole machinery seems to be devoted to helping people get along without what they need, instead of providing them with necessities. Our Coal Administration was never devoted to getting coal. Our industrial conferences were never devoted to getting steel. There has been a timidity and hesitancy about touching the real source and cause of the trouble. Whether the government feared to precipitate a worse condition, or whether it was merely the hesitancy of a cabinet to act without the President's leadership, time will have to tell; but inactivity in the face of menacing evils has been a very disquieting mark of administration policy during the last few months.

It is doubtful if the American people will always stand for these blow-ups which throw men out of work at Christmas time, and pull and haul them hither and thither in constant uncertainty and anxiety. Nothing is easier than to start a strike, as the professionals in this line well know. But to reconstruct industrial relations and build them on so solid and satisfactory a foundation that they remain and adjust themselves automatically when need is, requires a higher type of leadership than is now to be seen.

Without alcohol to irrigate them, the wild oat crops are certain to be less than usual.

Eternity—the time a school boy lives between Monday and Saturday morning.

The man who puts his character in pawn will probably never redeem it.

The real father recalls his own youth before he chides his son.

The original monumental liar was a chiseller of epitaphs.